

LEGISLATION TO SAVE OAK FLAT

HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE CHAIR RAÚL M. GRIJALVA

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Chair Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Ariz.) introduced the Save Oak Flat Act to preserve Tonto National Forest's Chí'chil Bįłdagoteel Historic District, also as known as Oak Flat, from destructive mining operations that will permanently desecrate the area and its tribal cultural heritage sites.

"I will work to move this bill forward, this land is going to be protected, and we're going to establish that you don't get to push around Native American communities just because you can make a profit." – Chair Grijalva

In 2015, a non-germane midnight rider was inserted into the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that mandated the transfer of a section of Tonto National Forest called Oak Flat to a mining company called Resolution Copper for proposed copper mining operations. Under its terms, the land transfer will take place within 60 days of the publication of Resolution Copper's final Environmental Impact Statement. Oak Flat remains sacred to several tribal nations in Arizona, including the San Carlos Apache Tribe, who have visited the area to conduct cultural ceremonies and gather traditional medicines and food for millennia. After Resolution Copper completes mining operations, the sacred site will turn into crater that spans roughly 2 miles.

This year, the Save Oak Flat Act is especially timely. Its reintroduction comes just after the Biden administration rescinded Resolution Copper's final Environmental Impact Statement, which the Trump administration had expedited and released in January of 2021. Congress must pass the Save Oak Flat Act to permanently prevent this land exchange from occurring.

WHAT DOES THIS LEGISLATION MEAN FOR OAK FLAT & TRIBAL NATIONS?

Throughout history, the erasure of Indigenous peoples and their cultures has set an unfair precedent of valuing profits over people. The land exchange became law only by circumventing the legislative process and preventing tribal governments from engaging in government-to-government consultation. Since its passage, tribal nations across the country have voiced their strong opposition to the Oak Flat land transfer. The Save Oak Flat Act builds on this resistance by restoring tribal sovereignty and protecting Oak Flat's sacred lands for future generations.

This legislation helps Indigenous voices be heard and allows for the preservation of Oak Flat's beauty and the integrity of the surrounding environment. Resolution Copper's mining proposals threaten to drain Arizona's water resources, contaminate local groundwater-dependent ecosystems, and cause irreversible damage to the area's natural attractions. Tribal communities will no longer have access to the land, and Tonto National Forest visitors will be forced to view its devastation when visiting the nearby Apache Leap. The Save Oak Flat Act will protect the area's tribal cultural resources from this looming threat and preserve its natural attractions for visitors and outdoor recreation enthusiasts alike.